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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN ARTICLE ON "HI" MAGAZINE

1. The following is an Embassy translation of a commentary on "Hi", the IIP-funded Arabic language magazine now on the stands in Jordan, that appeared in the independent, mass appeal Arabic language daily, "Al Arab Al Yawm."

Begin Embassy Translation:

"HI: Connection or Communication? The First American Magazine aimed at Arab Youth
Report by: Mohammad Hisham Abiyyah, Al Arab Al Yawm Daily Newspaper.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, the U.S. Administration has decided to turn to the Arab world with the huge media arsenal at its disposal, believing it could change the impression of the new Arab generation, whose fathers remain the main defendants in the attack that strongly shook America and practically made it realize that there are those who truly hate it.

The first of those steps was Radio Sawa, which went on the air about a year ago and was devoted to broadcasting modern Arabic and English songs in an attempt to attract Arab youth to it. Later, it intentionally began to mix songs with news from a U.S. perspective. Hence, Palestinian resistance operations were referred to as "suicide attacks" and Israeli assassinations of resistance men were called "targeted killings" and the occupation of Iraq was referred to as the liberation of it.

The second step was taken this month, when "Hi" - the first U.S. Magazine in Arabic, which is distributed in the Middle East, and mainly targets Arab youth - was published. This monthly magazine is edited by a number of U.S. and Arab journalists who reside in the United States. It also relies on some of those from the Arab world who love to write. The magazine receives direct support from the State Department, as openly stated by the editors in the magazine's preface. The editors candidly note that the magazine's main objective is to highlight true stories and U.S. values and traditions and to familiarize the Arab reader with them, and make him or her realize that there are many things that bring humanity closer together. The editors also explain why they chose "Hi" as the name of the magazine because it is an expression that is commonly used when exchanging greetings and, hence, becomes a prelude to a dialogue. They also note that they focus on Americans - other than those famous ones like Michael Jordan, Keanu Reeves, Shakira, and Madonna - who live a simple normal life away from stardom and Hollywood's spotlights, space exploration, world stock markets, new music, or sports stadiums crowded with spectators.

It is strange that the magazine did not really do what it set out to do. Its first issue is full of reports and news about "Michael Jordan", rising Jazz composer "Ben Ellison," and "Tony Shalhoub," the actor with Lebanese roots who recently received a Golden Globe award. This is as if the magazine could not free itself from the American lights and appetizers that have attracted so many people.

The magazine tries to focus on the experience of Arabs in the United States. It sheds light on a number of examples such as "Hisham Shami," a Moroccan who studies Business Administration and at the same time, is considered one of the best Oud players. The magazine also sheds light on "Salima Abdul Ghaffar," a brunette journalist who works as an editor for an Islamic newspaper published in Atlanta. There is also "Suhair Hammad," a poet of Palestinian origin, the most famous amongst those who recite poetry on Broadway. The magazine also gives lots of room for Arab youth to tell the story of their educational experience at various American universities. It deliberately makes extensive use of photos that show

many Muslim women that wear the hijab (veil) as an indication of the freedom that the Muslims enjoy in the United States. It also created a photos section titled "American Moments," in which the camera has captured snapshots of mountain climbers, moments that precede a wedding, and a day at an amusement park, in such an attractive way that dazzles the Arab reader.

The first issue of "Hi" magazine features an investigative report on smoking and nargilas (water pipe), which were recently introduced in the United States and have become quite popular. The reporter is dismayed that the price of a nargila in the United States reaches \$10, while in Egypt one can get it for not more than 25 cents. The magazine also features a brief report about Yoga, that says that this sport is becoming widespread in Egypt and attributes that to American movies, which, according to the report, have attracted Egyptian youth to this mental sport!

The magazine invites the Arab reader to write to it through its website on numerous topics dealing with culture and the Arab environment. It so seems that this is one of the main reasons behind publishing this magazine. Besides organizing a poetry competition for the readers, it also asks them to write about important rising figures in the Arab world and about differences and similarities between Arab and American poetry. The magazine also invites them to write about Arabic television programs that discuss marital relations and popular exercises and sports in the Arab homeland as well as the experience of studying at universities in Arab countries and the readers' most favorite Arab celebrities.

On its last page, under the headline "My Story," an Arab woman writes about her experience in the United States, which seems so rosy. She had met in San Diego with famous actor Richard Gere, who treated her very nicely just because she is an Arab! She also rode in a police car in New York just because she wanted to. She also tried her luck at the slot machines that are widespread in Las Vegas and was very nicely treated by the citizens of Virginia!

The Arab reader will surely be overwhelmed by a feeling of discomfort when he or she reads the magazine, which was printed and produced in an elegant and dazzling manner. Even though it seems like a bridge extended for communication between Arabs and Americans, the magazine avoids reference to any old or current political event or issue. It does not mention that there is an unbalanced conflict in the Middle East between the Palestinians and Israelis. Indeed, it does not mention Palestine on its price list on the cover and replaces it with Israel. Moreover, it did not refer to the presence of a U.S. occupation in Iraq.

In doing so, the magazine deliberately focused on entertainment in its first issue and, like Radio Sawa, might include meaningful political signals in its future issues. It also avoided running stories or photos that would contradict Arab and Islamic traditions. In the mean time, it deliberately focused - in an exaggerated manner - on the prosperous life that Arabs live in the United States and that such a life is so flawless. The magazine appeared eager to hear what Arab readers will tell them about Arab life and traditions. The accomplishment of such a thing is impossible, however, due to the fact that it is so hard for any Arab to tell the Americans in a comfortable and simple way about their dreams, aspirations, ambitions, problems, the educational system in their country, and the actors he or she likes in their homeland.

The U.S. forces continue to occupy Iraq, have no intention of getting out anytime soon, and are killing many Iraqis everyday. Moreover, U.S. support for Israel continues endlessly and, according to the U.S. point of view, the Palestinian resistance is blemished as terrorism.

All of that, in addition to the exorbitant price of the magazine - 9 Egyptian Pounds and 20 Saudi Riyals - may stand in the way of getting it across to the Arab reader in the first place!"

End Embassy Translation.

NOTE: THIS FULL PAGE REPORT FEATURES A COLOR IMAGE OF THE MAGAZINE'S WEB PAGE.
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